



THE INVINCIBLE STANDARD



The Invincible Standard

By

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The ugliest symbol in the world is undoubtedly the cross.

From the viewpoint of art, it defies all the laws of beauty: two straight pieces of rough-cut wood, blood-stained; lacking all the curves that are the lines of beauty, lacking all the play of light and shadow that is the essential of plastic art.

That which the cross suggests is so ugly that Bernard Shaw has cried out, "I object to the cross as I object to all gibbets." The cross connotes execution, bloodshed, the horrors of brutal punishment, the torment of slaves dying in parched agony for the terrible crimes they committed against their masters, the torture of prisoners hanging between the earth that they were too foul to encumber and the heaven that had no place for scum like they.

SYMBOLISM

When one compares this ugly, repellent cross-plank symbol with other symbols in the history of man's devotion, the character of the cross grows even clearer.

The Jews loved their symbolic star, snatched from the sky, to be a light for their feet, a guide for their journeying, a pledge of hope, and an assurance that God's eyes were always upon them.

Mohammed shrewdly selected the soft crescent moon as the symbol for his followers. What could be gentler, more fraught with hope, more calculated to lift the eyes from earth and the soul from sordid concerns, than this soft scimitar that hangs against the deep blue of the oriental sky?

Even the swastika, a symbol used by all peoples, from those earliest days when man first wedded symbolism to religion, has a mystery and a fascination that is lacking in the cross. The swastika, at least does not consist merely of two plain sticks grimly thrust out at right angles. The swastika breaks those lines; sends them mystically back upon themselves; suggests movement, the dance of life, the whirl of some exotic firework.

But the cross is inartistic; repulsive in suggestion.

"Cursed is he that hangs upon the tree" was the old summary of the Jews' attitude towards the cross. They did not even wish to mention the cross by its true name; hence, they used a euphemism to make it less repulsive. That is why, when Christ suggested to His Apostles that He might die upon a cross, Peter winced, as if Christ had struck him, and cried out imperiously and in complete revulsion, "Be it far from Thee!"

Shadow of the Cross

Yet, with the coming of Christ, the cross begins to throw its persistent shadow across history. It enters sharply, like the blade of an elongated sword, into the personal and private lives of people who are normally considered to be happy. The cross is a quite common gift from one Catholic to another. Among her wedding presents, the Catholic bride is quite likely to find and accept with gratitude a cross for the wall of her room. The priest, vesting for Mass, repeats a prayer accepting the "yoke of Christ," while he hangs on his shoulders the chasuble marked with the symbolic weight of the cross. It is the cross that is raised above the young religious at the moment of his or her vows. Around the soft throat of the young Catholic girl may hang, almost like a talisman, a simple cross of gold.

Why?

Why did Christ utter this astounding paradox, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me; for whosoever will save his life shall lose it . . ."? There's an ugly invitation, if ever one was issued. We can almost see the Pharisees shrink back and away at this ultimatum. They had always felt that Christ was odd and different; that from Him only the strangest of new standards could come. Yet, His invitation to shoulder a cross and carry it to a place of bloody execution was pushing this business of paradox too far. With His allusions to the cross, the whole matter of being a disciple of this Nazarene became not only ridiculous, but acutely repulsive.

Folly of the Cross

The Apostles were almost as startled as were the Pharisees. It jolted them to hear Christ speak almost with affection of this bloody thing that the Romans reserved only for notably atrocious criminals. They were troubled, and at times even vexed, when He displayed a sort of yearning for the cross. Calvary came and bruised the quaking earth with the ineffaceable shadow of the cross. Easter came to show a Christ still marked by the stigmata which that cross had made on His hands and feet. But Pentecost had to come to clear their doubts and difficulties, to make all mysteries plain, before the attitude of the Apostles underwent a change, and they, too, like their Lord, could stretch out their arms to this most repulsive of all symbols, this most shameful of all gibbets.

But change they did in their whole attitude towards the cross. It was with a joy that rose superior to humility that Peter learned it was his privilege to die, not by the swift sword that was to behead the Roman citizen, Paul, but on an ignominious cross, like that which had borne his Lord. Andrew, calm old man though he was, caught the cross of his

execution into eager arms and laid his lips against its rough wood. How could it possibly be, he wondered, that he was to be honored with this gift, of all natural gifts the most precious?

In This Sign

With astonishment, at first, and then with a hopeless shrug of indifference, the world, that did not find Christ Himself any too easy to understand, watched the cross, His cross, become a symbol for something new and different. They watched missionaries going forth to world conquest, armed with a victorious cross. They could not fail to see how that cross conquered, where the sword—so like the cross in form and yet so unlike, so sharp and so apparently powerful—completely failed. They saw beautiful women turn from lives of sin or from the allurements of vice and cover the rough wood of a cross with their tear-wet kisses. They saw the astounding contradiction of the rough ugliness of a cross that women saints had covered with roses. They saw hermits leave the university towns of Greece and Northern Africa to take up their abode in caves, where for decades they knelt, looking upon two small twigs that they had crossed and tacked upon the stone wall. It was—and the pagan scholars found the whole thing more than a little absurd—as if these hermits found in the crossed twigs a wisdom that the university libraries failed to furnish. Indeed, Saint Bonaventure, when asked, admitted that he did find in the cross a wisdom that university libraries could never furnish.

Battle Standard

The world saw the Crusaders hang the cross about their necks and march out, with Saint Louis at their head, to do battle against the crescent and its counterpart, the Mohammedan scimitar. They noted that Joan of Arc carried the cross over her heart, not only into battle, but also, with an even greater sense of triumph, to the very stake of her martyrdom.

All the while a kind of growing chorus is sounding throughout the Church. This inartistic cross is undergoing a strange change in significance. The vested choir of early Christian days sings out, "*Ave, crux, spes unica!*" "Hail, cross, our only hope!" No antiphon sounds from the Moslem minarets, no voice crying, "Hail, crescent, our only hope!" A mighty chorus suddenly fills the earth, "*Vexilla regis prodeunt*"—"The standards of the King advance." To the amazement of all the uninitiated, the standards of the King proved to be nothing but the cross of bloody Calvary and shameful death. Finally, as if to remove forever the stain of opprobrium from the phrase, "Cursed is he that hangs upon the tree," a saint teaches the Church Universal to sing, "*Arbor decora et fulgida*"—"O tree, so beautiful and radiant with light!"

Inspiration

Art achieves something almost miraculous. Despite the fact that the cross has no lines of beauty, Christian art makes that cross the very center of the finest achievement of Christendom. Catholic architects, working on the inspiration of the cross, convert the Roman law courts into the first Christian basilicas. Then, lo! the magnificent Romanesque, Byzantine, and Gothic churches prove to be no less than crosses laid upon the ground: the apse, that short section on the cross whereon Christ's head was laid; the nave, the long section of the cross that held His body; the transepts, the arms of the cross that held His hands in bloody security. The Church weaves the cross into the very decorations of its walls and at the very center of its cornices. The cross stands as proudly against the sky of every Christian land as does the flag of any great political empire. The cross becomes the distinguishing mark of the rising university. The cross is the beckoning finger that calls the sick to hospital and the homeless to refuge. The cross is the warning hand that rises even above the palace of the tyrant and bids him beware the power that is above all kings.

Sign of the Cross

The Church carries the cross still further. Moved with a divine instinct, the Church begins to confer all grace with the sign of the cross. The waters of Baptism are poured in a triple cross. Forgiveness drops upon the head of the sinner in the confessional as the priest makes the sign of the cross, in the air. Confirmation is conferred by the multiple crosses made by the Bishop's hand. A cross joins in marriage, and a cross blesses a young couple. Before the Host is placed upon the tongue of the man, or woman at the communion rail, it is moved in the form of a cross. Recurrent crosses seal the young priest to his new responsibilities and privileges. Finally, the crosses signed on hands and feet and head are the assurances given to the dying as they turn reluctantly, fearfully, towards the grave.

"I bless you," says the priest, and he makes the sign of the cross over the bent figure.

"Peace be with you," says the Bishop, and he accompanies his lovely wish with the unpeaceful sign of the cross. "Bless me, Father," begs the penitent, and the confessor answers with the sign of the cross. "Bless my child," the young mother requests, smiling, and she is happy that upon her infant's head has been placed the dark symbol of Christ's bloody death.

But Why?

In itself inartistic, connected with the most debasing form of punishment, the cross has come to enter fully and deeply into the life of every Christian. It has reached out to

influence art in all corners of the world. It is the sign of a blessing, where once it was the sign of a curse. Why? How did it all come about?

The answer is written in the history and the heart of every man and every woman who has ever known the meaning of that common fate of all mankind—sorrow. The cross ceases to be terrible, and becomes infinitely consoling because of its unique and beautiful connection with the sorrows of mankind.

Our Sweetest Songs

Even slight acquaintance with life brings weariness that makes unmistakably clear the universal fact of sorrow. Even casual reading convinces one that sorrow is the motif of the greatest masterpieces of the world, as it is the underlying harmony of the richest songs. Half of all drama, the deeper, truer half, is based on tragedy. We resent the carefree, too-happy and too-untroubled hero of a novel, for we realize he is untrue to life; untrue to our own lives. Sorrow is the shadow cast over every human figure as the sun rises on each newborn day; a shadow sometimes long, sometimes short, sometimes deep black, sometimes vaguely grey, sometimes vaguely blue.

Just to forestall a misapprehension, let us remember that there is, for the normal man and the normal woman, much of happiness and joy in life. There is not the slightest question that, measured against each other, happiness outweighs sorrow, or that happiness heavily outweighs sorrow in the vast majority of lives. Yet, sorrow cannot be escaped altogether. At certain times in our lives, sorrow seems to obscure all the other elements of living. Man recognizes sorrow as a familiar, even if not a welcome, companion. He knows it is one of the inescapable elements of existence. Then, because it is sharp and oppressive, it makes man forget or disparage his realest joys.

Two Courses

How, then, shall man greet and use this sorrow? There are two divergent courses open to him. He may face sorrow with pagan eyes. To the pagan, sorrow is always a horrible, repellent, oppressive thing. It is the mystery of mysteries. It comes without reason, remains without purpose, and leaves without solution. The pagan, who has no answer for any of the main problems of human existence, is completely stumped by the problem of pain. He must suffer as hopelessly as the beasts suffer, and with as little understanding of the reason or the purpose of this curse that has fallen upon him with such crushing weight.

No other man in modern times has written so convincingly of pain and sorrow as has Ibsen. He depicts sorrow as the relentless black hound on the heels of his chief characters. Then, having no answer to offer, he leaves his characters, like his famous

hero of "Ghosts," stretching out their arms to the unattainable sun. Sorrow is a hopeless riddle to the writer of "The American Tragedy." Sorrow, like an unlaidd ghost, stalks through the pages of the Russian novelists. Eugene O'Neill makes sorrow the motif of most of his plays. We may note, however, that the only O'Neill tragedy that does not end with the curtain drawn on bleak despair is *"Days Without End."* In this tragedy, the hero stands at the foot of the cross (and here we anticipate somewhat our answer to the question of sorrow), his arms hopefully extended in welcome to this explanation and solution of the sorrow of his life.

Pursuit of Pleasure

The inescapable facts of sorrow and pain added to pagan helplessness against this sorrow, have, in every period when pagan thought dominated the world, resulted in an attitude of "eat, drink, and be merry." This pagan recourse to pleasure is merely a feverish effort to escape the inescapable, or at least, since such escape is not possible, to deaden the sense of pain and the certainty of sorrow by oblivion through any means. In the days when they crowned themselves with the vine leaves of Bacchus, men got drunk to forget the mess in which they lived. Today, minus the vine leaves and the presence of any god, however fantastic, men get drunk to escape from reality. The pursuit of pleasure, to use the proper combination of words, catches men up in its fierce pace, not because pleasure can be caught, but because they hope pain can be outrun.

In contrast, we might say almost cut away, from this entire mad and hopeless attitude towards sorrow, is the cross and the Christian attitude towards the cross. Sorrow becomes almost a very sweet thing. It may even be very precious. The Christian suddenly looks up and sees across his life, not searing pain or deadening sorrow or overwhelming grief, which must be drugged with pleasure, but the shadow of the cross. He hears Christ tell him to take up his cross. Then, as if He were supplying an explanatory synonym, Christ adds, "My yoke is sweet and my burden light."

Burden Shared

Cross and yoke—Christ uses these two words as synonyms. Consolation comes rushing with that simple fact. We remember with sharp joy that the first man who carried the cross carried it, not alone, but in company with Jesus Christ. Simon of Cyrene is the prototype of all men who since then have taken up the Cross of Christ. Simon found he was sharing the burden of that cross with this infinitely attractive character. Then, through Simon's acceptance of his share in Christ's burden, he felt new hope coming into his life and a joy endured for him and for his family. Simon of Cyrene could not explain his new treasure, but he knew that the cross was really a yoke, sweet and light.

How? Christ's figures of speech are always both charming and consoling. Yet, no other of His figures of speech was more consoling than that by which He spoke of the burden of the cross as a yoke. **Joy shared is doubled; sorrow shared is halved.** That is the ancient phrase. Then we see—the yoke is uniquely a thing that must be borne by two. “My yoke is sweet,” cried the Savior. So, with blind faith, the Christian thrusts his neck into the yoke that is Christ's. He accepts the burden of sorrow and pain that is, he knows, inescapable. The weight of the rough yoke presses down upon him. Then in a sudden miracle, it seems to grow light; because, bent as he is, he looks to the side and makes his great discovery! A yoke is for two; a yoke is not meant to be borne alone. Carrying the burden that has been placed upon him, the Christian sees the head of the Savior near his own. The other half of the yoke is borne by Jesus Christ.

The Miracle

Christ spoke of a cross; it has proved to be a yoke. The Christian who accepts sorrow and pain in the spirit of the Savior's blessed cross or yoke discovers in the recurrent miracle that the main weight is being carried, not by himself, but by the strong shoulders of the Man of Sorrows.

The Christian's whole attitude towards the inevitable sorrows of life is changed, for man sees that pain and sorrow are no longer a curse, but a cross, a yoke. It is a terrible thing to have to stagger along under the weight of a curse. It is, however, a glorious thing to be permitted to help the Savior carry His cross.

The simple fact that each sorrow, each trial, is a chance to share in the bearing of the cross of the Savior has completely transformed the life of every saint that ever lived. The saints looked up and saw the cross of Christ. They saw Christ suffering on the cross; they watched Christ staggering along His excruciating *Via Crucis*; they saw Christ weighted down with the self-accepted instrument of His death. Then, the saints stretched out their arms almost instinctively and cried, “Lord, let me share Your burden. I will do willingly what Simon of Cyrene did under compulsion.”

Acceptance

Even if the saint has not yet the courage to ask that the weight of the cross be placed upon his shoulders, he lifts his head when sorrow or pain or trial bears heavily upon him, and says, “This is my great opportunity. By accepting this trial, I can actually help the Savior carry the cross that relentlessly crushed Him to the ground. I have not asked for this trial. I am not brave enough to want sorrow or pain. Yet, since, like Simon of Cyrene, I have been honored by the invitation to share the burden of the Savior, I accept. Give me a

little of your own strength, O Christ. Give me, too, a little of that willingness that welled up in the heart of Simon as he walked with You and bore a part, even though a small part, of the weight of Your cross."

At the moment of trial or sorrow, Christians who have wedded faith to self-knowledge naturally make a quick comparison. They compare the lightness of their cross with the tremendous weight of Christ's cross. Then they place their own guilt beside the innocence of the Savior. They go forward with their comparison. They see how willingly the guiltless Christ took up the cross that was to bear Him down again and again in brutal falls before He was finally to be borne up in the agony of a torturing death. They are ashamed that Christ, who so willingly accepted the cross and all the horrible implications of that cross, witnessed them, followers of Christ, groaning when only a slight splinter of a cross was rubbed roughly against their shoulder.

Willingness

Willingness makes difficult things easy. The Christian—notably, the saint—contrasting the willingness of Christ with his own reluctance and resentment, turns with a kind of divine eagerness to take up his part of the cross. Sorrow disappears and pain is forgotten in the joy of walking even the way of the cross in company with the Man who first trod it for love of men.

Then there comes to the Christian another reassuring conviction: All crosses that are laid upon the shoulders of men are placed there by the loving hand of God. Christ, when the disciples wanted to dissuade Him from entering upon His Passion, replied simply, "The chalice My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"

Yes, His prophetic eye saw all the human agents that were manufacturing that cross and other instruments of the Passion. Christ saw the high priests holding their grim councils; He saw Pilate hesitating, vacillating; He saw Jewish sycophants weaving the ropes that would bind Him. He saw Roman soldiers ordering a cross of such and such dimensions, and such and such carrying power. He saw cynical Herod thrusting Him back to Pilate and condemnation; He heard the clamors of the mob demanding His death, clamors Pilate had not the courage to deny; He watched the thousand hands that, if they were permitted, would have driven the nails into His hands and feet, and plunged the lance into His side.

Human Agents

Yet, it was as if Christ, seeing all this, brushed it aside. The high priests, Pilate, the sycophants, Herod, the soldiers, the mob were not the ones who made the cross "His cross." "The chalice My Father hath given Me..." Those human agents—the surge of human hatred and the bitter gall of human ingratitude; the Jewish faithlessness and the

Roman cynical injustice; the carpenters who fashioned the cross, and the centurions who commanded the soldiers to perform the execution—Christ looked beyond all these. He knew the cross could not be thrust upon Him unless His Father permitted it. More than that, no cross could lift Him high or crush Him low unless His Father saw in that cross the great opportunity for the serving of humanity and the exalting of His own beloved Son to heights no man had ever attained.

From the Father

—Christ took the cross the Jews desired for Him and the Romans ordered; He accepted it from the hands of callous soldiers who laughed with coarse amusement as they dropped it on His scourged back; He staggered beneath it, to the accompaniment of the ribald shouts and jeers of those who had so recently strewn His path with palms.

It was as if Christ saw neither Jews nor Romans nor mob; it was as if He saw only His Father holding out the cross to Him, and asking Him to carry it, as a great commander might carry his standard of victory into an apparently lost battle. Christ looked beyond those human agents that proudly or crassly thought themselves responsible for His cross. He saw only that His Father was using that cross to lift Him up in glorious reparation for man's guilt. He saw that cross as a ladder by which all mankind might come home to the arms of the Father of the prodigal.

The Christian Way

Pagans completely miss the point of the cross. For pagans, sorrows come from the hands of ungrateful, ungracious men. For pagans, pain is most often caused by the sins of those who love them and whom they love. Their crosses seem to be placed upon their shoulders by human hands.

Christians know better. Theirs is the attitude of Christ. They know it is possible to take the attitude that sorrow or inescapable pain comes from their fellow men. They know that the person who looks upon sorrows in such a light is crushed to earth. Yet, Christians know, too, that they can look beyond the human agents, beyond the natural catastrophe, and see, as Christ saw, the loving face of the Father.

Christ knew the immediate value of His cross. He knew what His acceptance of that cross would mean to the entire world.

In Faith

Man, even the saint, has no such clear knowledge. He finds it hard to see why these evil men or that set of tragic circumstances have been permitted to fashion his cross. He has

to accept the trial, almost wondering whether his acceptance will result in great things for his own soul and the souls of others. He also knows he needs no vision of what will come from his cross. The memory of Christ's cross is enough for him. He accepts his own cross with a deep and trusting faith. If the Father could make Christ's cross—coming to Him from the unspeakable malice and sin of men—accomplish so much for the world. If the Father could use that cross as the instrument of the whole world's salvation and as the very throne from which His Son was to rule humanity eternally—then that same gracious Father has in each smaller cross a very definite purpose that will someday be made clear.

Even before that purpose is revealed, the saint, the clear-sighted Christian, takes up his cross with a sublime act of faith. Like Christ, he looks beyond all the human elements that may surround his cross. He sees only the face of his Father. He accepts his cross in the spirit of Christ, his Leader. Thus, what might have been merely the crude, brutal weight of a fellow man's injustice or ingratitude becomes a splendid privilege, an opportunity to serve God and to gain grace for other men.

A Ladder

Earlier, we spoke of the cross as a ladder. In truest reality, it is a ladder. Christ, by mounting that cross, entered into the glory of His Father. The same thing is true of the cross of every Christian. His cross is his ladder to God, his step upward towards heaven. By their crosses, saints have also come into the very presence of eternal joy. By the ladders of their crosses, Christians today may rise to immortal reward.

Therefore, we see the ugly, repellent cross becoming the very touchstone that makes of blind, purposeless sorrow and pain something wonderfully beautiful and consolingly precious. To the pagan, the inescapable sorrows, pains, and grief of life, those human injuries that no science can ever dislodge, are horrible things, under which he groans and squirms in fierce resentment. To the Christian, the inescapable sorrows and pains are crosses a little like the cross of Jesus Christ.

This Symbol

What possible comparison can the lovely crescent moon of the Mohammedan, or the bright-shining star of the Jew, or the twisted swastika of the Aztec, the Assyrian, or the Nazi offer to this symbol, this symbol that transforms the sorrows of human existence into intelligible joy?

Millions of young men have been killed in war. Their death put an end to their earthly period of struggle and trial. Yet, their death rested like a horrible crushing weight upon the shoulders of their mothers and fathers, their wives, and their children. So, the white

symbol of the cross was placed over the graves of the dead. A crescent would not do; it would be meaningless. For these dead, there was no further growth. For them, there could be no symbolism in the young, almost feminine, sickle of the moon. A star would have no place above these dead; the star of their life was extinguished. The guidance they might have given to their dear ones had ended. The crazy pinwheel of the swastika would seem, on the calm climax of the grave, almost an insult.

Cross Triumphant

But the cross? Ah! Here was hope and assurance. A Man had mounted the cross in the blackest hour of His life. From that cross, He had risen to the fullness of His Easter. The shadow of that cross came to rest over the breaking heart of a Mother who had seen her Son done to death by His victorious enemies. Yet, that Mother knew her Son had died for His people, and had driven back forever the enemies who thought they had triumphed in His death. At the time, that cross had seemed to be a conquered standard against a sky gone black in defeat. Yet, that cross was to flame throughout the world; that cross was to be the one standard that was never defeated, never crushed.

Therefore, the cross was the only symbol that could possibly be placed over the graves of those who sleep on the battlefields. The cross bespeaks victory that rises out of defeat. It symbolizes life that came from the blackness of death. It speaks of hope that could hold fast the courage of mothers and fathers, of wives and children. It is the blessed sign of those who, following Christ into the defeat that is death, know that for those who follow Him there can be no lasting defeat, no complete control of death.

Science Falters

It is more than likely that, with the passing of the years, science will eliminate many of the pains and trials that have weighted, and still weight, humanity. Certain types of diseases have been checked. Science has seriously taken up the problem of poverty, though science has far, far to go before it can level, with any sort of decent approximation, the material inequalities of the world. Our lives are filled with remarkable comforts and titillating entertainment. Many an old shadow has been banished, and many an old-time ill driven into exile. Such material progress will, we sincerely hope, continue every year.

Oddly enough, the real crosses of our life come from none of the things that are within the power of science to cure. Science will probably continue to eliminate disease, especially the most virulent forms. Life spans may be lengthened, and the sorrow of losing those near and dear to us may be pushed back a few years. Poverty may be

reduced to a minimum. Luxuries and comforts may be more adequately distributed. But life's truest crosses are not to be found in disease, in the shortness of life, or in poverty.

Ourselves a Cross

Thomas Kempis, in his chapter "Of the Royal Way of the Holy Cross"—a chapter that ranks, not only as sound Christian philosophy but also as great literature and biting common sense—speaks of this truth. He understands and makes clear to us that the greatest cross each of us is called upon to bear is the cross of his own self. He states, "The cross, therefore, is always ready, and everywhere waits for thee. Thou canst not escape it, whithersoever thou runnest; for wheresoever thou goest, thou carriest thyself with thee, and shalt ever find thyself. Both above and below, without and within, which way soever thou dost turn thee; everywhere thou shalt find the cross." ("Imitation of Christ," Second Book, chapter xii, 4.)

In our more honest moments, we can very clearly understand why others find us a trial, for we are so consistently a trial to ourselves. We make such high resolves, and we keep them so badly. We plan so nobly, and we execute so imperfectly. We determine to set the world afire, and we strike only a faintly glowing match. Our struggles—vast, restless, ambitious—result in the most pitifully inadequate accomplishments. We furiously resent some fault in others; and soon we find ourselves guilty of precisely the same fault.

We Fail

What a trial men are to themselves! There are moments when we feel holy. Then, those moments are usually followed by temptations that set us reeling. We give wise advice to others; then we find we have not the strength to follow that advice in our own regard. We like to know that we are children of God; yet it is a struggle for us to keep far from the treason that leads to the devil.

Consider the scruples that torture some of God's greatest saints. Such a cross is a humiliating thing, for scrupulous people seem to lack common sense and the ability to see the obvious. Consider the cross of ill health. Consider the trial of the man who sees so much to be done and realizes his own limitations keep him from doing any decent share of the work. Consider the weight of human weariness. Consider the shameful but recurrent fact of laziness. Consider despondency, which has a way of poisoning even the fairly well performed actions of our lives. Yes, we ourselves are our own greatest crosses.

The pagan becomes nauseated with himself. Suicide is an inevitable terminus of a pagan life of self-disillusionment. Contempt for himself and contempt for the entire human race grow easily in the heart of the man who has not looked upon the cross of Christ.

Our Dignity

That cross is an enormous reassurance. Yes, I fail constantly. Yes, I am poor clay. Yes, my workmanship is imperfect. Compared with what I know I should do, my finest work is wretched dawdling and ineffectual playing in the sand. Yet, a God-Man considered me so important that He mounted that cross for my sake. He knew my imperfections and limitations far more clearly than I shall ever know them. Yet, He still thought me worthy of being saved; and He died for the purpose.

In a fit of false pride, the pagan says, "I've failed myself completely. I am utterly disgusted with myself. I don't deserve to live." Then he flings himself away from life or from the full use of life, because his pride in himself is hurt and it is more than he can stand. The Christian, in all humility, says, "Lord, I have failed. I shall probably fail again. That is my greatest cross. You were forced down to your repeated falls by the recurrence of my falling into sin and into the ways of imperfection. While I try to mend my ways, I shall bear my imperfections and my dissatisfactions with myself, bravely, because You were willing to bear these faults of mine, even to Calvary."

Take Up Thy Cross

To lighten the burden of Christ's cross, the Christian works to make his character as flawless as possible. He is not willing that Christ should be borne down again and again under the cross of his personal sins and imperfections. Yet, he does not quarrel with himself. He does not become hopeless about the imperfections of his nature. He does not grow listless because he has failed. He realizes there is no other cross as heavy as the cross of self-knowledge. The Christian, knowing that Christ carried the cross of his sins for his sake, asks for the grace to carry that same cross bravely.

There are also lesser crosses—the crosses others place upon us. As long as human beings are human, we cannot expect science to remove those crosses from our shoulders. The scientist, who is deep in the problem of fighting some disease that racks and tortures the human body, is likely enough, in the abstraction of his experiments, to snap at his secretary, be selfish with his laboratory assistant, and neglect his wife. It is known that an astoundingly large number of great social reformers have been difficult to live with. As long as men and women live and work side by side, they will, sad to admit, spend a large part of their time manufacturing crosses for one another.

Attitudes

In this matter of crosses, two important attitudes should be adopted from others.

EXPECTING OR MANUFACTURING CROSSES

First, never, under any circumstances, go about expecting crosses from others. The person who expects others to present him with crosses that, out of love for them, he intends to bear with heavy patience and for the entire world to see, is one of the most obnoxious mortals alive. He takes the most unintentional slight as a cross, and he lets it be known that he is bearing a cross. In fact, his exasperating patience beneath the weight of a cross we never meant to give him makes us want to present him with a real cross. Other people are constantly getting on his nerves. In this regard, it is a little difficult to see what right he has to the unlimited luxury of "nerves." His feelings are constantly being hurt. He is hurt if spoken to; he is hurt if ignored. If you ask him to help you with a job, he is being imposed upon; if you don't ask for his help, he is being overlooked. If he is consulted, he replies, with weary patience, "Oh, whatever you say." If he isn't consulted, he murmurs, in aggrieved fashion, "No one ever considers my opinion worth having."

There are enough real crosses in life; we don't have to go around manufacturing them. Men and women who make crosses out of their own heads had better look to the source of the material. No one has a right to expect crosses from others. The wise man is the one who hardly notices the crosses that others are sending his way.

PRESENTING CROSSES

The second is to firmly and vigorously determine to never, under any circumstances, present a cross to someone else. There is always someone in our life who finds us difficult. Each of us is a nuisance to someone else; it cannot be helped. Yet, one of the sweetest ways of bearing life's crosses is to see to it that, as far as possible, we are a cross to no one else.

Do unpleasant mannerisms jolt and annoy you? Then do not let unpleasant mannerisms appear in your dealing with others. Find out what it is that you dislike in others, and be sure that those things do not occur in you. Does the inconsiderateness of others bear down on you? Then be considerate in your dealings with others. Does the selfishness of others cause you pain and unhappiness? Then never permit your conduct to place such crosses on others.

Beyond the Person

When a real cross comes, the wise Christian accepts it, and uses all human ingenuity to put aside all personal resentment. The saint looks beyond the person who has offered that particular cross and sees the vague but clear outline of God the Father. It is hard to forgive human beings who place crosses upon our shoulders. It is easy to see that when God sends a cross He has some high purpose that concerns His own glory, our happiness, and the salvation of souls.

This much is certain: The greater the saint, the more crosses he has and richer and deeper is the measure of his happiness. The saint is overpowered by the sight of the world's sin. He staggers at the thought of men's reckless rushing towards ruin. He measures his actual accomplishments for God on the scale of his ambitions to serve God and he becomes richer in humility. He accepts the labor of hard missions and difficult assignments. He aspires to work for the more repulsive types of people. And, small sins seem vast and horrible in his eyes.

Happiness

Yet, the saint is never really unhappy. Sorrow scarcely touches the inner core of his happiness. He looks upon each trial as a chance to help Christ carry His cross. Every pain he suffers is another step up the ladder of the cross. He contrasts Christ's innocence with his own guilt, and is abashed at the small measure of pain and suffering that Christ asks of him. He flings out his arms towards the cross in the desire to take Christ's place, to relieve to some extent the agony of the God-Man he loves.

The Invincible Standard

We Catholics need have no real sorrows. We need experience no pain. We need have only crosses—only the feel of the rough wood brushing against our shoulders. Real unhappiness has no place in our lives. We should feel privileged to be allowed to help the Savior a little along the rough way of His Passion. No weight, however crushing it may seem, need ever press us to the earth. We carry our crosses, not alone, but in the company of Christ who, through His cross, gained a world and conquered forever sin and death and all the enemies of mankind.

The cross should have a place on our Catholic desks. The cross should look down from our Catholic walls.

Into our Catholic life the shadow of the cross falls, not ugly and terrifying, but with the large shadow that is cast by the glowing Figure of the God-Man, who bore our iniquities and was bruised for our offences. For we know, in the cross is light and life and hope and happiness.

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"The Easter Cross"

This picture shows us how the plain wooden cross of Our Savior can be turned into something beautiful if we have faith and the knowledge of what that Cross really is.

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